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TWO RELIEFS FROM ASSOS

[PLATE XXVII]

DURING a visit at Assos in the spring of 1896, Dr. Dörpfeld found two reliefs from the temple lying on the surface of the ground. With characteristic courtesy he offered them to the Archaeological Institute for publication with the rest of the Assos material. Both the reliefs are, unfortunately, in a very bad state of preservation; but, although the surface is defaced and the finer modelling entirely destroyed, still the compositions are complete and the style of the work as a whole is unmistakable. One of the blocks (Fig. 1) seems to have belonged to the famous exceptional sculptured epistyle; the other (PLATE XXVII) is a metope. The epistyle block is not so well preserved as the metope, the top and right end being lost. The bottom and left end show the original line of cutting. The line of fracture at the right end is very irregular and, so far as one can judge from the photograph, is in no part continuous with the original edge. This naturally suggests that the block extended in this direction, and was therefore too long for a metope. The second block shows the original edge certainly on three sides and probably in part on the fourth.

It is not difficult to see what figures are represented, though how they are to be explained is a question not so easy to answer. The supposed epistyle block bears the figure of a bull. At first sight the figure might seem to be that of a horse rather than of a bull, but the rounded shape of the tail and the rendering of the hind quarters show that a bull is rep-

resented. The horse-like appearance of the head and neck are due, if I mistake not, to the weathering of the block.

The influence of the East that is so noticeable a characteristic of these temple sculptures is shown clearly in this figure in the rendering of the line of the ribs and of the muscles of the hind leg. The sharp outlining of these parts reminds one strongly of the similar rendering on Rhodian and other vases. The sculptures as well as the vases show that their respective makers shaped their figures under the influence of the woven



FIGURE 1. —EPISTYLE BLOCK FROM ASSOΣ.

work for which the Eastern countries were famous. The conventions of the older and more familiar art were instinctively followed by the less practised masters of the other trades, for sculpture and pottery were little more than trades at this early time. The figure seems rather slim for a bull, but we must remember that we are dealing with the rather loose work of Asia Minor, and that our impressions of sculptured bulls are in the main derived from works of a purer Greek authorship. Furthermore, the peculiar weathering of the block makes the figure appear slimmer than it really was. The block belongs,

probably, to the same series as the lion groups found in 1881,¹ a series which seems to be of a decorative character somewhat similar to that of the friezes from Xanthos now in the British Museum.²

The metope block (PLATE XXVII) is carved with the figures of two nude men, probably bearded, running to the right, with arms and legs spread far apart. Who these figures are intended to represent it is not possible to say, in the present state of our knowledge of the sculptures, but it seems probable that the metope belongs to the same series with the two represented on Plates 21 and 22 of the *Report on the Investigations at Assos in 1881*.³ The complete nudity of all the male figures so far found at Assos is a point worth noticing in its bearing on the development of Greek sculpture.⁴ One might suppose that the difficulties of cutting drapery in such stone as was used caused the sculptors to depict the figures in this simple fashion, but the draped women on the epistyle block in the Louvre disprove this supposition.⁵ It is more likely that this characteristic shows merely an individual peculiarity of the sculptor, as in the case of Onatas or of the sculptor of the Aeginetan pediments. The "Harpy" (Siren) monument, the archaic reliefs from Ephesus, and many other works

¹ See *Papers of the Archaeological Institute of America*: Classical Series, I, pls. xvii, xviii. It is not impossible that the head of the bull was turned in full front, as in the case of the cow on the "Harpy" (or better "Siren") monument, and the Europa metope from Selinus (Gardner, *Handbook of Greek Sculpture*, I, fig. 22). This turning of the head was due, in a measure, to the difficulty of carving the two horns in perspective.

² *Catalogue of Greek Sculpture in the British Museum*, I, nos. 81, 82.

³ *Papers of the Archaeological Institute of America*: Classical Series, I.

⁴ Of one figure (*Papers*, etc., pl. 22, and p. 117), it is said that "his loins are girded with a cloth." This would be strange among all these nude figures and, when we bear in mind the bad preservation of the relief, we are justified in hesitating to accept the statement.

⁵ It is said in the *Papers*, etc., p. 117, that "the one complete metope relief represents a man pursuing a woman." This is, I believe, an error; for, as the figure is completely nude, it seems more likely that it is intended for a man. It may be thought that the drapery has weathered away, but as the part between the legs would be more protected than any other part of the block, this is scarcely probable.

of the same period show men fully clad. The statues of women and goddesses with their complicated draperies show that the nudity of the male figures was not due to technical difficulties. Women were always represented draped; for men there seems to have been no fixed rule, but as we should naturally suppose, each artist did as seemed to him best. The course of life tended strongly to influence the artists to represent men nude, though in complicated groups, such as the Aegina pediments, draped figures were introduced for the sake of contrast. These were the first beginnings that led to the superb and masterly contrasts in the works of Phidias and Praxiteles.

In freedom of action and crudity of modelling, the figures on the metope block are like all the others from the temple and like all the sculpture of the early time. That is, they show a complete lack of accuracy in every detail but give a life-like suggestion of real figures, owing to the wise neglect by the sculptors of trivialities and their bold representation of vigorous action. One frequently hears these archaic sculptures, particularly the Lions of Mycenae, praised for the detailed accuracy of their forms. Even Gardner¹ speaks of the "careful modelling and detailed truth to nature" of the lions. These qualities appear to me to be absolutely lacking in this work from Mycenae, and, with the exception of the Vaphio cups and a few other objects, in all other archaic work. The early artists are to be praised for their skill in seizing on general effects, not for their power in rendering details. This desire for the truth of effect led to one of the chief peculiarities of early relief work, — the twisting of the body on the hips, so that while legs, arms, and head are in profile, the trunk is represented in full front. It is generally supposed that this was due to the difficulties of representing so thick a part of the body as the torso in low relief. This, however, is not the reason; for the two legs are as thick as the body and yet they are in profile. The explanation which I believe to be the true one is confirmed

¹ *Handbook of Greek Sculpture*, I, p. 60.

by the fact that reliefs such as those of the "Harpy" (Siren) tomb, which show figures in simple positions and nearly or quite motionless, do not exhibit this twisting of the body. So soon as the positions assumed are complex, or the figures are represented as in motion, the bodies are twisted; had they not been so, these early sculptors, who were by no means finished masters, would have failed to get the truth of effect for which they sought. The motion of a figure is shown chiefly by the action of the legs and arms. The legs of a moving figure are practically in the same plane, and one is in front of the other with nothing between them, so that the Greek artist found no difficulty in representing them; the arms, on the other hand, being separated by the trunk, are by no means in the same plane. It was this difference in plane that caused the twisting, for unless the trunk were turned, part of the further arm would be hidden and it would appear shorter than the nearer one. Furthermore, the early Greek sculptors were, like beginners in the arts to-day, unable to draw or carve what they *saw*, but had a tendency to carve and draw what they *knew*. So by twisting the trunk the whole of the further arm would be shown. Since the trunk faces at right angles to the plane of motion, the contradiction between it and the profiled arms and legs is very marked, but as it was the limbs that suggested the motion, these early artists thought it more important to get them correct than to have the trunk so. They were not skillful enough to overcome these difficulties, and they chose what seemed to them to be the least objectionable solution of them. Figures at rest, but in contorted positions, show this same peculiarity (cf. the "Mourning" Athena or the grave relief by Alxenor) for a similar reason. They are in action, but not in motion, in the sense of moving forward, and their bodies do not show (like an upright or slowly-moving figure) equal action on each side of a perpendicular drawn through their head to their feet. I do not mean to imply that the artists reasoned out the matter as I have here done. Our greater knowledge of technique enables us to see the difficulties that the early

sculptor encountered, and to understand many of the peculiarities of his work. That the eye also is shown in full front, while the figure is intended to be in profile, is due, probably, to the same reason; the sculptors carved the figures from memory and not from nature; not being used to noticing the eye except from in front, they showed it from this point of view.

The character of the modelling of the reliefs from Assos should be considered in regard not only to its representation of nature but also to the handling of the material. In this respect the flatness of the figures and the sharpness of their outlines are noticeable. Semper¹ called attention to the empaestic character of the reliefs, and his remarks have often been repeated. In the *Report of the Investigation at Assos* we find (p. 121): "Not only the detailed forms of the decoration of the temple of Assos, but its position upon the building, point to the prototype of a work of hammered metal. . . . The reliefs upon the epistyle, the principal constructive member of the entablature, warrant the conjecture that the timbering of ancient Asiatic fanes was overlaid with sheets of metal, as is known to have been frequently the case with the columns and walls." Collignon says:² "Quant à la frise, par une disposition tout à fait inusitée, elle couvrait les blocs qui formaient l'epistyle, immédiatement au-dessus de la colonnade; et là aussi, comme à Éphèse, il est bien difficile de ne pas retrouver le souvenir des revêtements métalliques, appliqués à l'architecture en bois." Further on (p. 184) in his consideration of the figures he speaks of the "gestes raides et gauches, exécution monotone et plate, qui sembla trahir l'imitation des reliefs en bronze repoussé." Gardner says:³ "These are the same subjects which we find on early bronze reliefs and other decorative works, and they follow just the same types; thus additional confirmation is lent to the theory that these sculptures on the

¹ *Der Stil*, 2d ed. I, p. 406.

² *Histoire de la Sculpture Grèceque*, I, p. 182.

³ *Handbook of Greek Sculpture*, I, p. 112.

architrave are but substitutes for an ornamental casing." These various statements need further evidence before they can be accepted. It is, of course, true that metal was occasionally used to encase columns and to decorate walls, but what ground is there for stating of these sculptures that their "*position upon the building* points to the prototype of a work in hammered metal"? Is any building known that had such decoration of bronze? Why, too, do the "detailed forms" point to this? It is true that the modelling is similar to that of many works in bronze, but exactly the same sort of modelling is shown in the figures on the early vases and in terra-cotta figurines. That similar characteristics are common to works of every description of the early plastic arts is due not to the imitative instincts of their makers, but to the fact that the qualities of the various materials were not understood; not till a much later time did the artists appreciate the different means of expression offered by various materials. Conventions proper to works in bronze were repeated in works of stone, not because the makers of the latter were copying the bronze works, which were doubtless the commoner in the archaic period, but because they did not understand that the peculiarities they reproduced were conventions and not necessary methods of representation. Broadly speaking, there was but one way in Greece and the places under her immediate influence to represent a figure, and that way had been developed by the workers of bronze. So in such places as Rhodes there was another way which had been largely influenced by weavers.

That the subjects of the Assos sculptures are, as Gardner says, the same as those of early bronze reliefs, and follow the same types, is a very doubtful proof that the "sculptures are substitutes for an ornamental casing." These subjects were the same for every kind of work of art. As well might one say that the early intaglios are "substitutes" for bronze rings, or that the early vases are "substitutes" for metal ones. Furthermore, where is there any evidence for such lavish use of metal as this "substitute" implies? It is hardly credible that

the "timbering of ancient Asiatic fanes was overlaid with metal." Even columns or walls so covered¹ were not frequent.

What the position of these sculptures does show is that the Asiatic Greeks did not understand the use of sculpture for architectural decoration. The work of the sculptors at Ephesus shows the same misconception, and from this early time down to the very end, Asiatic sculptors continued to make the same mistake. The carved columns of Ephesus and the friezes of the Nereid monument are other examples of mistaken decoration, due solely, I believe, to love of display.

One other point remains to be considered—the date of these works. Whatever questions as to the date of the temple may arise from its plan and construction, none can exist as to the period when these figures were carved. We cannot tell the exact decade, but we can be sure of the approximate time. This is determined by the modelling of the surface, by the mistakes (twisted head of lion), by the draperies (Nereids), by the faces of the Sphinxes, by the legs of the men, by the types of the scenes, in fact, by every detail and by the general effect. It must have been late in the sixth century B.C.

The sculptures are not beautiful; they are not even of very deep interest, though their vigorous action and dramatic energy are worthy of earnest study. They are the work of a provincial school in a country where the Fine Arts never attained their noblest development. They emphasize, however, the inimitable quality of the work of Greece proper, showing, as only contrasts can show, the superb attainments of the Grecian sculptors and how wide-spread and civilizing their influence was.

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¹ It may be suggested that the temple of Athena Chalcioecus in Sparta (Pausan. III, 17, 3) offers evidence for the architectural use of bronze. That this temple was adorned with bronze reliefs is true, but there is no evidence that they were used as are the figures at Assos or Ephesus. Considering the subjects represented, we might believe them to have been metope groups—but this is pure conjecture.



RELIEF FROM ASSOS